



City of Austin

Communications and Public Information Office

301 W. Second St., Austin, TX 78701

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Doug Matthews, Chief Communications Director

DATE: October 17, 2017

SUBJECT: Final Report on CIUR 1826/Council Resolution No. 20161103-047 regarding Childcare Options for Public Meetings

On November 3, 2016, City Council passed a resolution directing the City Manager to explore options for providing childcare at public meetings, and to bring forward recommendations and potential budget implications for the FY2018 – 2019 budget cycle. On April 28, 2017, staff provided an update on the progress made by the interdepartmental working group and area partners that participated in the discussion. This memo serves as the final report in response to Resolution No. 20161103-047.

Summary

Implementing a policy that covers the entirety of Council meetings, Boards and Commissions, and committee/working group meetings would be both logistically and financially challenging. If Council chose to proceed with a children's activities policy, the working group recommends focusing on:

- Children's activities for community meetings and community engagement activities that occur outside of the City's more formal proceedings and have clear start and end times;
- Community meetings and engagement activities where the City is seeking active participation from adults; and
- Providing activities for children that are potty-trained (roughly ages 4 and older).

Based on feedback from potential vendors and service providers, the cost to provide child care activities at the estimated 350 applicable public meetings conducted in one year could range from \$84,000 to \$112,000. The attached report provides a more detailed analysis of the working group's findings and recommendations.

Recommendation and Next Steps

Based on an extensive dialogue with City departments, the Early Childhood Council, potential vendors, and interested stakeholders, staff recommends:

The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request.



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- **Piloting children’s activities at several public meetings during FY2018.** Three of the six CodeNEXT Open House public meetings are already scheduled to provide children’s activities. CPIO will coordinate with other departments throughout the year to identify more opportunities to pilot these efforts. Staff will apply many of the approaches recommended by the working group, document what works and where there may be opportunities for improvement, and survey parents about the services provided. The information will be used to develop a scope of work for solicitation.
- **Utilizing the City’s procurement process to solicit proposals.** Although funds must be allocated to launch a solicitation, staff recommends beginning the process to draft a scope of work while continuing to search for other funding opportunities.
- **Exploring relationships with local colleges and universities.** The Early Childhood Council suggested partnering with local college and university programs in Early Childhood Development and/or Social Work to reach students who may be seeking practicum hours and are willing to provide children’s activities services at a lower rate. Staff will reach out to area education programs to gauge interest in possible partnerships.

If sufficient funding mechanisms to support a RFP/RFQ cannot be identified, staff will propose a budget item for Council consideration during the FY2018 – 2019 budget cycle, per Resolution No. 20161103-047.

Please feel free to contact me at 512.974.2231 or via email at douglas.matthews@austintexas.gov with any questions you may have.

CC: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
Ray Baray, Chief of Staff

**Childcare Options for Public Meetings
Council Resolution No. 20161103-047
Final Report**

Purpose

This report serves as a final report in response to Council Resolution No. 20161103-047 which directed the City Manager to explore options for providing childcare at public meetings, and to bring forward recommendations and potential budget implications for Fiscal Year 2018-2019.

Background

The Communications and Public Information Office (CPIO) led an interdepartmental working group in researching and evaluating the issues outlined in Resolution No. 20161103-047. The working group included representatives from Parks and Recreation, Planning, Equity, Public Health, Resource Recovery, Watershed Protection, Neighborhood Housing & Community Development, and Transportation. The working group also sought feedback from United Way of Central Texas, the Austin Independent School District (AISD), and the Early Childhood Council to contribute in its discussion of the following questions:

- What are the best practices for supervised children’s activities for public meetings?
- What types of public meetings should have activities?
- What age children shall be the focus?
- Who should provide these services?
- What credentials should providers have?
- What are sources/opportunities for funding?

Findings and Recommendations

In researching best practices, the working group found only one community that provided children’s activities during public meetings. Brookhaven, Georgia, a community in the northeastern suburbs of Atlanta, with a population just over 50,000, piloted a program known as “Kids Night In.” Brookhaven’s pilot program focused on children ages 5-12, supervised by Parks Department staff, and offered child care activities throughout the course of city council meetings, no matter how late they ended. It is important to note that Brookhaven’s council meetings are much shorter evening meetings that occur less frequently. In addition to Brookhaven’s program, the working group also relied on previous experience providing children’s activities at community meetings to guide their discussion and recommendations.

Types of Public Meetings. Overall, the group determined that it was best to focus on community meetings hosted by City departments at which the City of Austin is seeking

the public's input, such as neighborhood planning meetings, stakeholder meetings, public summits/workshops, etc. Such meetings require active participation by adults in attendance and have clear start and end times. When meeting end times are uncertain or active participation varies heavily, such as at City Council and Boards and Commission meetings, it is difficult to provide or budget for supervised children's activities for the duration of the meeting.

The group developed estimates of the number of meetings that would be appropriate for supervised children's activities. The total number of estimated meetings in a given year ranges from 350 to 400 and does not include meetings for special circumstances (e.g., CodeNEXT, bond discussions, etc.).

Logistics. The group determined that activities provided for children at City meetings should ideally take place in the same room as the meeting itself, on the condition that they did not distract from parent participation in the meeting. If the room selected for the meeting could not accommodate an area for children's activities or if the activities selected would make excessive noise, staff could locate the children's activities in a nearby space at the meeting venue. Co-locating the children's activities area in the same meeting space or in close proximity to the meeting space allows parents and children to easily access each other, especially in situations where children may not feel completely comfortable being separated from their parent(s).

To plan appropriately, the group discussed whether or not to establish a reservation system. Ultimately, the group felt that providing the services regardless of a reservation system was important and recommended communicating that the services would be available to parents even if a parent did not RSVP. While an RSVP system could be optional, group members did not want to create a barrier to a parent's planned or unplanned decision to participate in a community meeting.

Target Age of Children and Staffing Ratios. Largely due to logistics and state-required staffing ratios, the working group recommends providing activities for children that are fully potty-trained which generally starts at the age of 4 years and older. Providing a minimum of two staff members is ideal to allow one person to remain with the children if a child requests or needs to be taken to their parent. Currently, the City's child-to-caretaker ratios for the Parks and Recreation Department's Youth Recreation Program are:

- 12:1 ratio for ages 5 – 9
- 15:1 ratio for ages 10 – 13
- 4:1 ratio for children with a disability ages 5-12
- 8:1 ratio for children with a disability of ages 12 and 13

Vendor Qualifications and Credentials. In terms of qualifications for those leading supervised children's activities, the group researched the credentials utilized for City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department staff who work with children, consulted outside experts, referenced the

State of Texas's requirements for caregivers at childcare centers, and reviewed requirements utilized by the Austin Independent School District. A detailed summary of required credentials is provided in Appendix A.

Overall, the group believes the credentials currently required by the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department, with some possible enhancements, could be required of any vendor contracted to provide children's activities.

Potential Service Providers and Costs. In consultation with AISD and the United Way, the group believes that the best course of action is using the City's RFP/RFQ process to determine interest and capacity within the region. Additionally, some group members recommended that the City solicit for a single vendor who could provide a team of qualified caregivers for these services, rather than a rotation list of multiple agencies from which the department hosting a community meeting would choose. While there are many potentially qualified providers, the unique nature of "on call" childcare for short periods of time (generally two hours or less) may not be attractive or feasible for some vendors. Utilizing paid City staff for such activities would require removing them from regular duties and/or accruing overtime to provide service. The intermittent nature of the work would make recruiting and retaining temporary staff challenging.

In terms of developing costs estimates, the group evaluated the pay range of City of Austin Children's Program Technician and Specialist positions which pay between \$14 and \$30 per hour. Assuming 350 meetings per year, two hours per meeting, with two activity leaders for each meeting, estimated annual costs could range **between \$20,000 and \$42,000** for wages, absent any additional costs for supplies or other related expenses. However, representatives of United Way and Extend-A-Care suggested that estimates could be closer to \$60 to \$80 per hour per staff member or **between \$84,000 to \$112,000** when including all other expenses for snacks, supplies, etc.

Potential Funding Mechanisms. Utilizing an extensive database of grants specifically dedicated to youth education programs, staff attempted to identify grants that may be available. To date, staff could not identify appropriate grant opportunities, but will continue its search.

Survey Data. The group developed and distributed a survey via SpeakUpAustin.org to provide additional insight about offering supervised children's activities during public meetings. While there were only 33 respondents, responses confirmed many of the recommendations provided by the working group:

- Most respondents thought it was important to have a child care provider licensed by the state of Texas;
- Most respondents thought it was somewhat important to have educational activities provided to their children when they were being supervised; and

- Most respondents thought it was very important to have activities that catered to their child's age.

Additionally, 2017 community survey data indicates that the top three reasons residents shared as barriers to participation are 1) inconvenient meeting times (53%), 2) Inconvenient meeting locations (38%), and 3) participants don't feel they can speak freely (18%).

Lack of child care ranked fifth (6%) out of the seven reasons residents were not participating in public meetings.

Recommendation and Next Steps

Based on an extensive dialogue with City departments, the Early Childhood Council, potential vendors, and interested stakeholders, staff recommends:

- **Piloting children's activities at several public meetings during FY2018.** Three of the six CodeNEXT Open House public meetings are already scheduled to provide children's activities. CPIO will coordinate with other departments throughout the year to identify more opportunities to pilot these efforts. Staff will apply many of the approaches recommended by the working group, document what works and where there may be opportunities for improvement, and survey parents about the services provided. The information will be used to develop a scope of work for solicitation.
- **Utilizing the City's procurement process to solicit proposals.** Although funds must be allocated to launch a solicitation, staff recommends beginning the process of drafting a scope of work while continuing to search for other funding opportunities.
- **Exploring relationships with local colleges and universities.** The Early Childhood Council suggested partnering with local college and university programs in Early Childhood Development and/or Social Work to reach students who may be seeking practicum hours and are willing to provide children's activities services at a lower rate. Staff will reach out to area education programs to gauge interest in possible partnerships.

If sufficient funding mechanisms to support a RFP/RFQ cannot be identified, as directed in the resolution, staff will propose a budget item for Council consideration during the FY2018 – 2019 budget cycle.

Appendix A. Child Care Personnel Credentials

City of Austin Requirements

Child care personnel at the Parks and Recreation Department have the following certification, training and additional documentation requirements:

- Meet requirements under City of Austin Criminal Background Investigation
- Valid Texas Class C Driver's License (for position that require driving)
- Obtain valid CPR/AED and First Aid Certifications within thirty (30) days of hire
- Complete eight (8) hours New Employee On-Boarding Training prior to first day of assignment. New Employee On-Boarding Training provides training and assessment/testing over:
 - Employment Information and Expectations
 - Customer Service
 - Participant and Personal Safety
 - Suspected Abuse of Participants
 - Quality Program Development Principles
 - ADA and Inclusion
 - Positive Behavior Intervention
- Complete additional onsite training:
 - Site/Program Specific Standards
 - The following as applicable for assigned program
 - Program Site and Food Standards
 - Health and Wellness Standards
 - Transportation Standards
 - Field Trip Standards
 - Aquatic Standards

An activity leader must retain the following certification from a nationally recognized organization approved by the director:

- Basic water rescue, or equivalent, as approved by the director, if supervising a recreational program that includes swimming;
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation for adults, children and infants;
- Use of an automated external defibrillator; and
- First aid.

A person may not be employed or serve as a volunteer in a recreational program if the person would be permanently barred from being present at a child care operation while children are in care under the Texas Administrative Code Title 40, Part 19, Chapter 745 (Licensing); or the director determines that, based on the criminal history and other relevant and credible information, the person poses a risk to the safety or health of participants.

Staffing Ratios: Standards include providing one activity leader for every 12 children between the ages of five and nine years old, and one leader for every 15 children between the ages of 10 and 13. For participants with a disability, the ratio is 1:4 for disabled children ages 5-12 and 1:8 for children ages 12 and 13.

Facility Standards: Austin PARD Afterschool Programs are hosted at facilities within PARD's infrastructure. Because they are City of Austin owned facilities, insurance and building requirements all fall under the City of Austin's insurance and liability, including the Local Standards of Care for the City Parks and Recreation Department's Youth Recreation Program ([Ordinance #20160225-62](#)).

The City also has standards for facilities used for children's activities:

- The facility and equipment used in the program do not present fire, health, or safety hazards and are kept free of refuse and debris.
- The facility is inspected annually for safety by the department.
- The facility is kept free of insects, rodents, and stray animals.
- The facility has clearly marked emergency exits.
- The facility has a disaster and evacuation procedure posted in a visible location.
- The facility is used and maintained in accordance with the fire prevention requirements of Chapter 25-12 (Technical Codes) and the fire chiefs directives, including not fewer than four fire drills each year.
- First aid and infection control kits are kept at the facility, including sufficient additional kits to be taken to other locations at which participants engage in a program activity.
- First aid guidelines are visibly posted at the facility, including:
 - cardiopulmonary resuscitation and rescue breathing sequence guidelines;
 - first aid review; and
 - emergency action plans.

State of Texas Requirements

The State of Texas has additional requirements associated with caregiver requirements that pertain more to the operation of a child care facility, rather than children's activities:

State of Texas caregiver requirements:

- DFPS background check
- Be free of active tuberculosis
- [Notarized Licensing Affidavit for Applicants](#) for Employment form;
- Orientation to the child-care center
- 18 years old or older
 - 16 and 17 year old may be employed with a High School diploma or equivalent and with supervision from someone 18 and up
- High school diploma
- Eight hours pre-service training

- Pre-service training emphasizes the different developmental needs to children of different age groups.
- Prescription medications can be given by a caregiver with parental consent and knowledge of the proper way to give the child their medicine.

State of Texas required activities:

- Morning and afternoon outside play.
 - Work spaces for the children that chose to work on homework.
 - Small (i.e. arts and crafts) and large (i.e. kickball) muscle development.
 - Opportunity for social and emotional development.
 - “school-age children benefit from an after-school care program that provides an enriching contrast to the formal school environment. Activities including team sports, cooking, art, dramatics, music, crafts, and games allow them to explore new interests and relationships.” -Min. Standards for Child Care centers. Subchapter K
- Regular meal and snack times.

Austin Independent School District Requirements

AISD utilizes the following standards:

- Minimum qualifications mandated by Texas Department of Family and Protective Services ([see *Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers*](#))
- 24 hours of annual training, which meet the criteria outlined in the Standards
- Adherence to the standards and criteria of the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC) and [Workforce Childcare Solutions Texas Rising Star Program](#)
- Adherence to district policies related to criminal history checks, employee ethics/conduct, etc.

United Way Recommendations

Representatives of the United Way recommended that the City work with activity leaders younger than 18, and 22 or older for supervisors while applying the following standards:

- a fingerprint-based criminal background check for any activity leader,
- a TB screening,
- a pre-employment physical
- a minimum of 4 months experience in a licensed facility OR at least 12 college credits in child development and 1 month of experience in a licensed facility. Bonus points for working at a TRS-quality rated facility or nationally accredited facility.
- a minimum of 24 hours of pre-service training which includes: information about different developmental needs of children of mixed ages; behavior management strategies; handwashing, sanitation, and safety standards; appropriate activity ideas for children of different ages (songs, games, crafts, stories, manipulatives)
- References